

**December Questions and Answers:
Baptism For the Dead
I Corinthians 15:29**

Franklin Church of Christ Edwin Crozier December 5, 2004 PM Worship
--

Introduction:

On the second Sunday night of each month, we examine the Bible to answer questions previously submitted. During this lesson, we will examine a question that addresses a passage I have considered one of the more difficult to understand—I **Corinthians 15:29**: “Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?” For many years, I addressed this passage by saying, “I do not know what it means, but I know what it doesn’t mean.” I am not extremely satisfied with that kind of answer, therefore, I continue to study this passage. Presently, I am very comfortable with what I believe this passage means. At the same time, I recognize that more study may convince me otherwise. Tonight’s lesson therefore should not be viewed as the definitive exposition of this verse, but simply me sharing where I am right now on this verse to help you in your study. My only prayer is that we keep our minds open to God’s will and grow in understanding it. Perhaps this lesson will spark more thought and study to help us understand God’s word more clearly.

By way of introduction to this verse, we must understand the general context. Paul is making a logical argument to prove a point. The discussion in **I Corinthians 15:1-11** is about the resurrection of Jesus and the witnesses to His resurrection. Paul segues from this to addressing some false teaching found in Corinth. Some of the Corinthians were teaching there was no resurrection (**15:12**). For the rest of the chapter Paul proves there is in fact a resurrection and he explains that resurrection. **I Corinthians 15:29** is written in the context of demonstrating the truth of the resurrection. Thus, whatever our final decision about the meaning of this verse, it must be a logical argument demonstrating the truth of the resurrection.

I want to make this study as simple as possible. All we are going to do is examine what the four main terms in Paul’s question mean. Then, once we understand each term we will look at the question again. I believe then we will have a clear picture of Paul’s question and Paul’s meaning.

Discussion:

- I. Who are “those”?
 - A. Track the pronouns used.
 1. **15:1** – I = Paul, you = Corinthians.
 2. **15:10** – I = Paul, them & they = other apostles, we = all apostles, you = Corinthians.
 3. **15:12** – you = Corinthians, some of you = the Corinthians teaching no resurrection.
 4. **15:14** – our = apostles, your = Corinthians.
 5. **15:15** – we = apostles.
 6. **15:17** – you = Corinthians.
 7. **15:19** – we = apostles (possibly the combination of I and you, meaning Christians).
 - B. Who are “those” baptized for the dead? It is not all Christians in general, for that would be “we”. It is not the apostles, for that also would be “we” as in **15:30**. It is not the Corinthians in general, for that would be “you”.
 - C. Who else fits into “those” in the context? Possibly it is some group that is not Christian. However, that falls short because this question could not be a defense of resurrection, since what the pagans did would have no bearing on resurrection. In the context, Paul must be referring to the group of Christians at Corinth who were teaching no resurrection. Those people were being baptized for the dead. No one else was doing that, just those who taught no resurrection.
- II. What does Paul mean by “baptism”?
 - A. Get rid of your assumptions.
 1. I have often heard of a list of seven different baptisms in the New Testament.
 - a. Baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3**).
 - b. Baptism of John (**Acts 19:3**).
 - c. Baptism into Moses (**I Corinthians 10:2**).
 - d. Baptism of fire (**Matthew 3:11**).

- e. Baptism of the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 3:11**).
 - f. Baptism of suffering (**Mark 10:38**).
 - g. Baptism for the dead (**I Corinthians 15:29**).
2. Do you notice the assumption made in this list? The assumption is baptism for the dead is completely different from any other baptism mentioned in the scriptures. The problem is if this is a different baptism in which Christians are to participate, the scriptures do not give us enough information about how to accomplish it. They don't tell us in what to immerse someone for this baptism. They don't tell us what the baptism is to accomplish. **II Timothy 3:16-17** tells us the scripture furnishes us for every good work. If this is a different baptism, the scripture doesn't equip us for this good work.
- B. Thus, we reasonably deduce that Paul is saying some are trying to use one of these six baptisms with which the Corinthian Christians would already be familiar for the dead. By process of elimination we can determine which baptism some are using for the dead.
1. This is not speaking about the baptism of suffering. Paul's next point in **I Corinthians 15:30** is about the suffering that all Christians endure. If Paul was speaking of the baptism of suffering, he would have included himself in the baptism of **vs. 29**.
 2. This is not speaking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In every case of the baptism of the Holy Spirit recorded in the New Testament (**Acts 2** and **10**), it is something the Holy Spirit does to someone, not something anyone could go do.
 3. It is not the baptism of fire, because, in the context of **Matthew 3:11**, the baptism of fire is the fire of judgment, being burned up like the chaff. This is something done to people not something they do.
 4. This is not Moses' baptism. That referred to the Israelites who went through the Red Sea.
 5. This is not the baptism of John, because that baptism was no longer practiced.
 6. Thus, Paul must be referring to baptism for the remission of sins that brought people into Christ. The Corinthians were very familiar with this baptism having participated in it according to **Acts 18:8**. Paul's point is some were being baptized for the remission of sins, but it was for the dead. In connection with the teaching of no resurrection, their baptism was pointless.
- C. Without getting too far ahead, we should note two points here.
1. We need to keep in mind what is the real eternal benefit of baptism for the remission of sins. According to **Philippians 3:8-11**, "in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" I have to be in Christ. **Romans 6:3** and **Galatians 3:27** demonstrate that we enter Christ through baptism. This ties some strings together for us. The baptism for the remission of sins gives us the hope of resurrection, but what point is there in that baptism if there is no resurrection?
 2. Consider also this point before moving on. We must remember that baptism into Christ benefits only one person, the one doing it. Keep this in mind. It will be important as we notice our next point and when we conclude our study.

III. What does "for" mean?

- A. The term "for" in the phrase "baptized for the dead" translates the Greek word "huper". According to Strong's Enhanced Lexicon, this term is used in scriptures to mean various things, i.e. in behalf of (**Matthew 5:44**) and for the sake of (**John 13:37-38**).
- B. Thus, whatever this baptism is, it was done on behalf of or for the sake of the dead. That is, it was done in order to benefit the dead. Keep in mind our last point, baptism into Christ only benefits the one who is obeying it. Thus, as we read the question we have already learned something about our next point. "The dead" is representative of those who are being baptized.

IV. Who are "the dead"?

- A. Get rid of your assumptions.
 1. Some suggest this is speaking of particular dead individuals. If that is the case, what particular individuals are in mind and to what passage would you appeal to prove it?
 2. Does the passage speak of dead relatives, dead friends, dead people who never heard the gospel, those who died on the way to being baptized ... How would you know? Neither this

text nor any other defines any particular individuals for whom we may be baptized after they are dead. This passage must not be talking about some action we do for some other individual who is already dead.

- B. The context, however, demonstrates something other than doing this for particular individuals. The phrase “the dead” in **I Corinthians 15:29** translates the Greek word “nekron” and is not used in a vacuum. For example, this term is used in **15:12, 13** and **20**. This term was used to describe the state of death or the grouping of those who were in that state. In context of no resurrection doctrine, the state of death is permanent. The dead will remain dead and never be anything more than dead.
 - C. In contrast, another form of the word is used in this very chapter to focus more on dead individuals. “Nekroi” is used in **15:15-16** to speak of dead individuals not being raised. “Nekron” is the state from which the “nekroi” were raised. Thus Jesus was one of the “nekroi (dead individuals)” who was raised from the “nekron (the state of death or group of the dead)”.
 - D. Remember, baptism into Christ only benefits those who are participating in it. We have already concluded that those who are being baptized in this verse are the ones who teach no resurrection. Thus, they are trying to provide a benefit for themselves, through baptism, that they cannot have because they are going to be dead, only dead and always dead. Once they die they will never be anything but dead.
- V. Paul is asking a rhetorical question.
- A. In the context of **15:30**, “Why are we also in danger every hour?” we recognize **15:29** is a rhetorical question. That is, a question whose answer is so obvious, it is not being given to elicit the answer from others, but rather to make a point.
 - B. Consider the question in light of all we have learned so far. Those who taught no resurrection had been baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins. But what did they expect it to do for them? The eternal benefit of baptism is resurrection from the dead. Those people who taught no resurrection had no hope. Why then were they baptized? When the only real and eternal benefit of baptism is resurrection what will they do, since they don’t believe in resurrection and were, therefore baptized only to be dead? Paul’s rhetorical point is about those who taught no resurrection. Their action in baptism contradicted their doctrine of no resurrection. Paul’s question really is, “Why are these people getting baptized into Christ if they have no hope of resurrection through Christ?” Why are they getting baptized just to die and just be dead forever.
 - C. Of course, that line of reasoning led to the next logical step of pointing out in **I Corinthians 15:31-32** that nothing they would do as Christians would benefit them. They might as well “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”.
 - D. To sum up, Paul was demonstrating the inconsistency of those who taught no resurrection in **I Corinthians 15:29**. They must expect something to happen after death, otherwise, why be baptized at all? Their position of no resurrection is illogical, not only in reference to the truth revealed by the apostles, but also in reference to their own practice of baptism.
- VI. Why is this important to us?
- A. This is important for us in much the same way it was important for the Corinthians. This gives us hope. Understanding the point of this question strengthens the argument for a resurrection. Thus understanding what this verse means actually strengthens our hope that there is a resurrection. We understand that God did not command baptism in vain. It is for something. It grants us resurrection. There is an eternal life that we have to look forward to. Whenever this life gets difficult, we know the resurrection will come and will make it all worth it.
 - B. This is important for us, because some Christians today teach there is no resurrection. That is, there is no future resurrection. Some claim the resurrection took place in 70 AD at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Whether one says there is no resurrection at all or the resurrection has already passed, the result is the same. Our hope is gone. The only hope offered us is resurrection from the dead or perhaps being alive when Jesus comes. Understanding this verse will help us combat the false doctrine that the resurrection has already passed. Additionally, with **I Corinthians 15:33** in mind, we learn we must not allow a doctrine of no resurrection to be taught in this congregation. Nor can we be in fellowship with those who teach it. Bad

communications corrupt good morals. This false teaching will corrupt good action. The person teaching no resurrection may not have corrupt action now, but the doctrine leads to corruption and, therefore, we cannot espouse it or support it.

- C. Finally, understanding this verse is important because it demonstrates the necessity of baptism. The only way Paul's argument makes any sense is if baptism actually affects whether or not we will be resurrected to life. If baptism is a good thing to do or a nice thing to do, but not essential to salvation, then his whole argument falls apart. If baptism does not really affect whether or not we are going to be resurrected to eternal life anyway, then Paul's point doesn't make sense. Paul says, there is a resurrection and God's command to be baptized proves it. This implies that in order to attain the resurrection unto life, we must be baptized. Without baptism in water for the remission of sins into Christ, we will not attain the resurrection to eternal life. If you were baptized with some other baptism, consider your soul carefully.

Conclusion:

I know our topic has been difficult. I hope this lesson has been helpful. As we conclude, I want you to understand that there will be a resurrection (**John 5:28-29**). Following God is not vanity. Not following God, however, is tragedy. Prepare for resurrection to eternal life by being baptized for the remission of your sins (**Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4**). This action is not for those who will just be dead, it is for those who will be raised from the dead.